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DOES ORGANIC FOOD INTERVENTION IN SCHOOL LEAD TO CHANGED DIETARY PATTERNS?

—results from a web-based questionnaire among school meal coordinators in Denmark and Norway

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<http://www.ipopy.coreportal.org/>

Introduction

During adolescence food habits, physical activity, and life style of young people are easily influenced by a number of actors and phenomena in the environment including parents, friends, advertisements and all of the changes occurring in society. The meal patterns formed during adolescence will be continuously influenced into their adulthood even following generations in the future. Since school increasingly is taking a role in both food provision and in health, environment and nutrition education of young people by implementing healthy and environmental friendly policies, it is relevant to investigate the relation between the different components of such interventions. In other words it is relevant to ask the question: does organic food supply police go hand in hand with healthy eating policies. This study that has been made possible through the iPOP project looks at the relationship in Danish and Norwegian school food setting by asking school headmaster about their policies and operational procedure in relation to school food. The purpose of the study is to explore the relationship “green” food policies & praxes to “healthy” food policies & praxes in public school food settings. The outcome of the research/questionnaire will be a mapping of serving practices in relation to healthy eating and the relation to attitudes and practices of organic procurement and policies.

Methodology

A quantitative survey using a Web based questionnaire (WBQ) design has been performed in Denmark and Norway. Both the schools have organic food provision (POP schools) and conventional schools (non POP schools) in these 2 countries were invited to respond the WBQ. The participants are school meal coordinators. **POP:** Public Organic Food Procurement Policy refers to a policy, in which a specified amount of specified foods are expected to be organic, which are practiced in public organizations offering food.

The sequence of the WBQ is mainly followed as background information, policies and serving practices.

Background information

- Personal
- School Policy
- Public organic procurement policy
- Food and nutrition policy
- Health school promoting
- Green flag school
- Serving practice
- School fruit scheme
- School milk scheme
- School tuck shop
- School hot/warm meals

There are totally 168 schools that have completely answered the WBQ, and 64 have partly answered. The project is a part of the iPOP research project which is funded through the European Research Arena project CoreOrganic.

(www.coreorganic.org)

Results

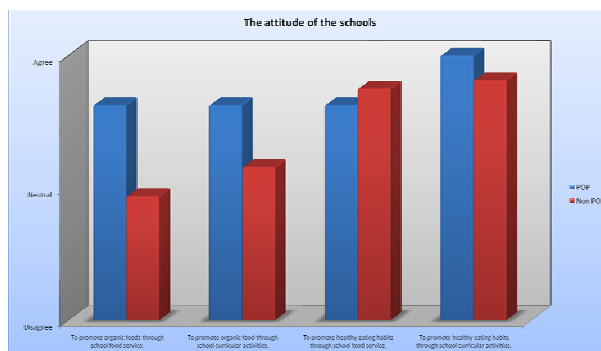


Figure 1 shows the attitude of the POP schools and the non POP schools, in relation to if the school has responsibility to promote organic food and healthy eating habits, through school food service and curricular activities. It can be seen that POP schools have more positive attitude than non POP schools in most attitude.

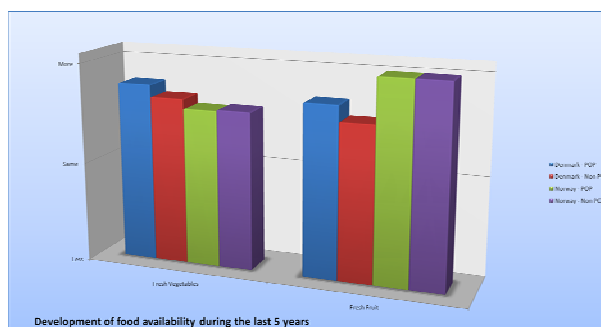


Figure 2 shows the changes of fruit and vegetable availability under the last 5 years both in Denmark and Norway. The POP schools in Denmark has consumed more fruit and vegetable than non POP schools, however the situation in Norway is no difference were found.

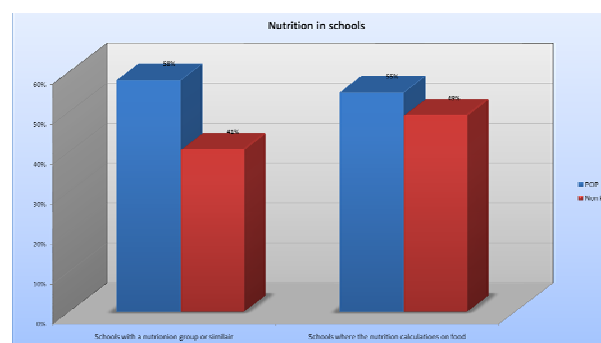


Figure 3 shows the comparison between POP schools and non POP schools with regard to the nutritional issues. Over half of the POP schools have nutrition group or canteen group or similar and 41% of non POP schools have it. There is more POP schools food /menus nutritionally calculated on a regular basis than non POP schools, but there is not a significant difference between them.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between serving practices for healthy eating and organic procurement policies at the school. It shows the consumption of healthy food is proportional to the organic procurement policies. And the POP schools seem to consider more about healthy issues for children than conventional schools. Also the results suggest that the POP schools think school should take more responsibility regarding children's health. Therefore, it seems that organic food intervention in school can help to build a healthy eating pattern amongst pupils. Additionally, it getting more and more schools is interested in organic theme, not only in school food but physical activities.